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## <NEWS>

### Logging the Lukuru: Update on the Conservation of *Pan paniscus*.

*Jo Thompson*

*(Director, Lukuru Wildlife Research Project)*

As long as humans have inhabited the environs of the central basin forests they have subsisted on them locally as a source of wood for charcoal and

fuel (firewood cooking and heating), building material, traditional medicine and food. However, commercial use of the forest, the extraction of valuable hardwood timber, is differentiated from subsistence use. Commercial use refers to trees being removed by timber logging companies to obtain the wood primarily for sale to industrialized countries through unprocessed timber exports. This trade-scale production depends on large equipment which opens access routes into the

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forest, human laborers which increase local populations and agricultural conversion, and transport vehicles and routes which provide avenues to convey other materials (such as bush meat) to distant locations, usually urban centers.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has the greatest extent of closed forest in Central Africa, greater than the closed forest areas of Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo Republic, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon combined. In the DRC unoccupied land is claimed as State-owned and can be granted as 25-99 year leasehold logging concessions. Within the bonobo (= *bilia*) range, research sites have generally been located away from these commercial-scale timber extraction projects which, for the most part, are confined to the shoulders of navigable waterways, primarily the major tributaries to the Congo River. In recent decades the deteriorated or absent roadway system, away from navigable waterways, constrained the effective extraction of forest materials from the central block and much of the remote central basin forests remain intact. However, the central DRC forests are increasingly at risk with the renewed focus on commercial enterprise opportunities which came with the change of political administration in May 1997.

Remnants of the Karl Danzer-Furnier Werk SIFORZAL timber concession, abandoned in 1987, persist in the western portion of the Lomako Forest, where bonobos have been intermittently studied since 1974 at a number of base camps. To date this is the only commercial logging activity that has been reported near a bonobo study site. Following the notable awareness campaign on the commercial demand for gorillas and chimpanzees in Cameroon and Congo Republic conducted largely by Karl Ammann, in February 1998 Jef Dupain and Karl Ammann sought evidence of a similar harvest on bonobos. During 29 days monitoring the commercial market in Basankusu, Dupain and Ammann recorded 4 ape carcasses, all reported to originate within the Lomako Forest area (Bonobo in situ: IYEMA, unpublished report, No2, 1999).

In March 1998 a Malaysian Forestry Group lead by a Canadian consultant conducted an initial reconnaissance survey inspection of the

forest hardwoods and logistics of the Lukuru Wildlife Research Project (LWRP) area (see Pan Africa News 5(2), for a description of the site and conservation activities). While promising the local human population the establishment of a plywood manufacturing factory, schools, hospitals, and the influx of major personal finances with guaranteed wealth abundant, their primary considerations were exploitable flora, feasibility and safety. The Canadian consultant was the same individual who was in charge of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) project between 1976 to 1991 which led to the designation of several timber extraction concessions in Equateur Province, the core occupancy of bonobos throughout their range. Although the Malaysian and Canadian executives were reported to be looking at forest throughout the Congo Basin, the Lukuru Project area provided logistical avenues to transport cut timber down the Lukenie River and decomposed, but repairable surface access down national Priority Regional Route 701. While the Malaysian Forestry Group and Canadian consultant were on-site, the LWRP Director and two additional team members from the local area met with the reconnaissance team to present details of our conservation initiative, history in the area, and educational campaigning efforts throughout the Zone. In July, 1998 the Director of the Lukuru Wildlife Research Project personally contacted the Malaysian Forestry Group Director in Sarawak, Malaysia and followed up communications in writing. In August 1998 renewed warfare erupted throughout DRC, temporarily halting live animal traffic in orphaned bonobos as of December 1998 from the Equateur Province and transport of bushmeat to Kinshasa (personal communication, Claudine Andre-Minesi, November 1999). The LWRP Director received an official letter from the Director of the Malaysian team dated October 9, 1998. He reported that they had decided to look elsewhere for forest resources to harvest and will not be proposing a timber concession in the Lukuru area. In part, their decision was influenced by the presence of our organized bonobo project with uniformed staff, the presence of a non-national scientist onsite with an established history working cooperatively with

the local people, and our effective conservation initiative. At no time was there a threat of local commercial demand for bonobo meat.

In November 21-22, the SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) hosted a two day data-gathering meeting in Inuyama City, Japan in preparation for conducting a full-scale Bonobo Population and Habitat Viability Assessment (PHVA). Working cooperatively, representatives from all active field sites identified threats to local bonobo communities and set priorities for action. It was agreed to proceed with the assumption that bonobo researchers must be prepared to mobilize immediately with the cessation of the current national conflict and resumption of regional security. Certainly the government will establish priorities which we assume will mean creation of a surface infrastructure and commitment to logging concessions in the peripheral forest block. We are preparing to recommend logging strategies (based on the primate research conducted by the Budongo Forest Project, Dr. Andrew Plumptre) as soon as commerce returns to the DRC which will promote long-term bonobo occupation and potentially increase bonobo density.

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